

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
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P R 261225Z DEC 77
FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0156
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PDEV, PBOR, IS
SUBJECT: GUSH EMUNIM--READY TO FIGHT BUT PESSIMISTIC

REF: TEL AVIV 10883

1. SUMMARY: GUSH ACTIVISTS NOW READY TO FIGHT BEGIN
OVER HIS PEACE PROPOSALS. NONETHELESS, THEY STILL HAVE
PROBLMES CONFRONTING BEGIN THE MAN, WHOM MOST STILL LOOK
TO WITH REVERENCE. MEETING AT OFRA ON DECEMBER 27 OF
GUSH ACTIVISTS AND REPRESENTATIVES OF SETTLEMENTS BEYOND
THE GEREEEN LINE IS FIRST ACT IN FORMATION OF OPPOSITION
FRONT. HOWEVER, DOWN DEEP GUCH MEMBERS ARE
PESSIMISTIC THAT THEY CAN TURN BEGIN AROUND. END SUMMARY.

2. EMBOFF VISITED THE WEST BANK SETTLEMENT OF OFRA
ON DECEMBER 24 AND HEARD A GOOD CROSS-SECTION OF
GUSH EMUNIM ACTIVISTS REACT TO BEGIN'S PEACE PROGRAM.
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THERE WAS CLEARLY NO CONSENSUS ON WHAT TO DO.
SOME CONTINUED TO BELIEVE IN BEGIN AND COULD NOT
CONCEIVE THAT HE WOULD GIVE UP ISRAELI SOVEREIGNTY
OVER THE WEST BANK. OTHERS ARGUED THAT HE HAD CROSSED
THE "RED LINE" AND THAT IT WAS TIME TO TAKE ACTION
AGAINST HIM. THE LATTER NOTED THAT THE RAFAH AREA
WAS AS MUCH ERETZ YISRAEL AS THE WEST BANK; AND IF

BEGIN WERE WILLING TO GIVE UP ISRAELI SOVEREIGNTY OVER THE SETTLEMENTS THERE, THEN THERE WAS NO REASON TO EXPECT HIM TO DEMAND IT FOR THOSE ON THE WEST BANK.

3. ALL THE GUSH ACTIVISTS PLEDGED THEMSELVES READY TO FIGHT BEGIN IF HIS PROGRAM INCLUDED GIVING UP ISRAELI SOVEREIGNTY OVER THE WEST BANK. ACTIONS THAT THEY WERE CONTEMPLATING WERE BUILDING UP OF A OPPOSITION FRONT, DEMONSTRATIONS, AND A WILDCAT SETTLEMENT PROGRAM. THE FIRST STEP IN THE SETTING UP OF AN OPPOSITION FRONT IS THE DECEMBER 27 MEETING IN OFRA OF GUSH ACTIVISTS AND REPRESENTATIVES OF SETTLEMENTS BEYOND THE GREEN LINE. THE GOALS OF THIS MEETING WILL BE PUBLICITY AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A COMMITTEE WITH A MANDATE TO SPEAK AND ACT IN THE NAME OF THOSE OPPOSED TO THE BEGIN PROGRAM. EXPECTED ALLIES IN AN ANTI-GOVERNMENT CAMPAIGN ARE THOSE LIVING IN SETTLEMENTS IN THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES (WHO ARE MOSTLY LABOR PARTY AFFILIATED), THE COMPLETE LAND OF ISRAEL MOVEMENT, AND LIKED DEFECTORS.

4. THE GUSH PEOPLE WERE ALL QUICK TO EXPRESS THEIR WILLINGNESS TO FIGHT, BUT MANY WERE SURPRISINGLY PESSIMISTIC REGARDING THEIR ABILITY TO TURN BEGIN AROUND. SEVERAL TIMES EMBOFF HEARD GUSH MEMBERS SAYING LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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THAT MANY WERE GIVING UP THE FIGHT EVEN BEFORE IT HAD BEGUN. MOST LOOKED BACK FONDLY UPON THE DAYS WHEN THE ALIGNMENT WAS IN POWER AND WHEN DRAWING PUBLIC SUPPORT WAS SO EASY. MANY FELT THAT THE GUSH HAD MADE A SERIOUS ERROR WHEN IT HAD ACCEPTED A LIMITED AMOUNT OF SETTLEMENT IN IDF CAMPS IN SAMARIA. IN ADDITION, THE PACE OF EVENTS WAS SO RAPID THAT THERE MIGHT NOT EVEN BE TIME TO FORM AN EFFECTIVE OPPOSITION FRONT.

5. YISRAEL HAREL, YEDIOT AHARONOT CORRESPONDENT AND A GUSH FELLOW TRAVELLER, WAS ALSO PESSIMISTIC. AT FIRST, HE TRIED TO MAKE THE POINT THAT GUSH PEOPLE WERE NOT QUICK TO TAKE ACTION OR TO DEMONSTRATE, BUT ONCE GEARED UP COULD EXERT A STRONG MORAL INFLUENCE. HOWEVER, HAREL ADMITTED THAT BEGIN WAS LIKELY TO HEW TO HIS PRESENT PLAN AND COURSE OF ACTION, REGARDLESS OF THE OPPOSITION PUT UP BY THE GUSH. BEGIN ALSO HAS PUBLIC OPINION ON HIS SIDE. HAREL ESTIMATED THAT IF BEGIN WERE TO CALL ELECTIONS TODAY, HE COULD WIN 85 SEATS ON A PEACE TICKET. NONETHELESS, HAREL EMPHASIZED THAT THE

GUSH WILL ATTEMPT THE MOST EFFECTIVE OPPOSITION IT CAN.

6. COMMENT: MANY GUSH PEOPLE STILL HAVE DIFFICULTY OPPOSING BEGIN THE MAN EVEN WHEN THEY DISAGREE WITH HIS PROPOSALS. AWARE OF THIS, BEGIN TAKES PAINS TO MAINTAIN HIS IMAGE AND HAS HANDLED ERRANT GUSH MEMBERS GENTLY. WHEN THIRTY GUSH MEMBERS WERE ARRESTED ON DECEMBER 25 FOR DEMONSTRATING IN FRONT OF HIS RESIDENCE WITHOUT A PERMIT, BEGIN HAD THEM RELEASED SAYING HE DID NOT WANT TO LEAVE FOR EGYPT WHILE GUSH MEMBERS WERE IN JAIL. IN ADDITION, BEGIN MET WITH RABBI KOOK (A RELIGIOUS MENTOR OF THE GUSH) AND ELICITED A STATEMENT THAT THERE IS NO NEED FOR LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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CONCERN REGARDING THE PEACE PLAN. BEGIN IS AHEAD OF GHE GUSH AT EVERY TURN. NONETHELESS, THE GUSH IS PREPARING TO FIGHT FOR ITS BELIEFS, ALTHOUGH LESS THAN SURE OF SUCCESS.
LEWIS

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